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August 30th, 2021

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Senate Majority Leader
United States Senate
S-230, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

Re: Emergency Funding for Afghan Parolees

Dear Majority Leader Schumer and Speaker Pelosi:

I write to convey the urgent need to authorize emergency funding to the Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) to address the estimated influx of 50,000 Afghan evacuees¹ arriving in the United States for fear of persecution from the Taliban. The United States government must do everything in its power to give refugee resettlement agencies the resources needed to meet this moment, and ensure that an Afghan humanitarian crisis does not become a United States humanitarian crisis.

Refugee resettlement agencies and their community partners nationally, including those in my Congressional district - Jewish Family Services, the International Institute of Buffalo, Catholic Charities, Journey's End and Jericho Road - have a long history and the expertise necessary to successfully resettle Afghans. The agencies in my district alone are preparing to resettle 350 Afghan evacuees. It is estimated from agencies on the ground that up to 80% of Afghan evacuees will be humanitarian parolees, a unique status that allows for lawful presence in the United States based on urgent humanitarian or significant public benefit reasons. Many risked their lives working in concert with U.S. troops towards a more democratic Afghanistan, and face persecution under Taliban rule. However, humanitarian parolees are not eligible for assistance afforded to other categories of refugees, such as food, housing, and health care services, placing them at a catastrophic disadvantage. We must ensure Afghan parolees can access ORR-funded services to prevent a wave of homelessness, food insecurity, and poor health upon their arrival.

Resettlement agencies locally and nationally are capable of the immense task facing them if emergency funding is authorized expeditiously. My hometown and the largest city in my district, Buffalo, NY, is a success story for embracing immigrants and refugees. Buffalo's population grew for the first time in 70 years in part due to an influx of refugees and immigrants.² Thanks to the work of our refugee resettlement agencies, thousands of individuals have built new lives in Western New York, opening small businesses,

¹ Sophia Cai, "U.S. Tells Refugee Aid Groups to Get Ready for 50,000 Afghans," Bloomberg, August 24, 2021. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-08-24/u-s-tells-refugee-aid-groups-to-get-ready-for-50-000-afghans>

² Caitlin Dewey, "Census data shows Buffalo growing for first time in 70 years," The Buffalo News, August 12, 2021. https://buffalonews.com/news/local/buffalo-growing-for-first-time-in-70-years-according-to-census/article_e18d79e6-fb92-11eb-8123-3f09381360f1.html

spurring job growth, and fostering community.

Our nation needs the assistance of these agencies to help the Afghan evacuees who helped us, and these agencies need the help of the United States government to help us honor our commitment to them. Thank you for your attention to this most urgent matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Brian Higgins". The signature is stylized with a large, looping "B" and a trailing flourish.

BRIAN HIGGINS
Member of Congress